

BAPTISM.

By Rev. E. P. Marvin.

You ask me, as your Pastor, for the Scriptural Mode of Baptism.

Neither the exact mode of baptism, nor of the Lord's Supper is vital to the validity of the ordinance, nor is it a justifiable foundation for a sect. Baptism was never made a test of Christian fellowship in the Apostolic Church. Sweet charity and brotherly toleration should prevail on both sides. In the spirit of candor and charity, I will give you a brief Bible lesson which may help you to settle the question for yourself.

As a preface let me say, that in the new, free, and more spiritual dispensation, it is highly improbable that any ordinance like Immersion, so difficult in many cases, and absolutely impossible in some, should have been instituted. Acts 15:10, 11.

1. The word in classic Greek means to dip, to wash, to dye, to color.

New Testament writers were often obliged to modify or change the meaning of classical words to express Christian ideas. They repeatedly changed the form of the classical word for baptism. They did not use it as an exact modal word. Baptisms are repeatedly spoken of in the Word which we know were not immersions, but washings, pourings and sprinklings.

The word, properly translated wash and washing, in Mark 7:4, is baptize and baptizing in the Greek, and we know that the Jews did not immerse themselves before eating, nor did they immerse their tables or beds.

In Luke 11:38 the Pharisees marveled that Christ did not wash, Greek baptize, before dinner. It is then clear that the word baptize in the Gospels, sometimes means to wash.

2. It is also certain that Paul repeatedly calls sprinkling, baptism.

In Heb. 6:2, the various ceremonial cleansings of the Tabernacle and Temple are called baptisms, but none of them were performed by immersion. All were washings and sprinklings.

In Heb. 9:10, these baptisms are called "divers washings" because water, blood and ashes were used. Then in verses 13, 19, and 21, they are more definitely defined as sprinklings. See the ceremonies of Leviticus. Heb. 10:22.

3. What is the symbolic meaning or purpose of baptism? Is it, as two isolated texts seem to some to teach, the burial and resurrection of the believer with Christ? But the Lord's Supper commemorates the death of Christ, and the Lord's Day his resurrection. Should both "sacraments" represent the same thing? Heb. 12:24. 1 Pet. 1:2.

And again, how could baptism represent death and burial with Christ to the disciples of John, and those who were baptized before Christ died, since they did not clearly understand that he was to die and be buried at all? How meaningless it would have been to them at its first institution. What then does it signify?

As we understand the Word, Christian baptism was originally intended to signify moral and spiritual purification by the grace of God, and especially by the Truth and Holy Spirit. Tit. 3:5, 6.

Physical washings and sprinklings have always been common in Oriental countries, as symbols of moral cleansing. When Pilate washed his hands, all understood instantly, the symbolic meaning of the act. The original corruption of nature, and the guilt of transgressions, were ceremonially cleansed in this manner.

Study Ps. 51:7, Isa. 1:16, Jer. 4:14, and references to the future in Ezek. 36:25, and Isa. 52:15. The purification of the New Dispensation was to be like pouring or sprinkling, and to be symbolized accordingly.

Sins were to be symbolically remitted by baptism. Mark 1:4, Acts 22:16. In John 3:25, 26 a question arose about purifying, and this we see pertained to baptism, showing that the disciples understood baptism to symbolize purification, as did the "divers baptisms" of the Levitical Law. John 2:6, 8.

The original mode of baptism was repeatedly connected with the baptism of the Holy Ghost. See Acts 8:15-17, and 19:1-6. The Holy Ghost came down upon Christ at his water baptism, and afterward upon the Apostles as a refining and purifying fire. See the promise in Acts 1:5, and the fulfillment in Acts 2:3, 17, 18, 33.

The Spirit descended like a dove upon them. John 1:33. This descent of the Spirit upon them reminded Peter of the promise or a far more important baptism than that with water, and which resembled it in mode. Acts 11:16. Had not the mode been similar, the Pentecostal scene could have been no reminder of the promise.

If water baptism was by immersion, there was no clear similarity.

In many cases as at Pentecost, and night conversions, it is scarcely possible that disciples could have been so readily immersed. Acts 2:41, and 16:15, 33.

An early picture in the Roman Catacombs, represents Jesus standing in the Jordan, and John pouring water on his head. Pictures of baptismal fonts for pouring are also found there. All paintings of baptismal scenes for more than a thousand years, in the Catacombs, St. Peter's, the Vatican and the Versailles Gallery, so far as I can learn, represent the act as sprinkling or pouring.

We may then see two absolute Scriptural facts:

1. It can not be proved that any disciple in the New Testament times was immersed for baptism.

2. It is sure that pouring and sprinkling were called baptism, and so understood by the early disciples.

Now, dear brother, I leave this simple and brief Bible study with you. Though it may not fully convince you that sprinkling or pouring water on the person in the name of the Trinity, as practiced by nine-tenths of all Christians in the world, is valid baptism, it surely ought to convince you that true Bible Christians may in this baptism with water instead of in water, be answering a good conscience and honestly obeying the Gospel.

No one baptized by sprinkling need be troubled in conscience about the mode, and Christians who fall out and contend either way, should turn their attention to weightier matters, especially seek the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and learn to practice the blessed grace endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.